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Westminster Lectures

E FREEDOM OF THE WILL

BY

REV. A. B. SHARPE, M.A.

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WESTMINSTER LECTURES

EDITED BY REV. FRANCIS AVELING, D.D.

THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

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PREFACE

THE peculiar difficulty which attends the consideration of the Will, with regard to its freedom or determination, lies in the fact that the subject is merely a division of a much larger one, and cannot be satisfactorily discussed without some attention to questions in which the Will is not directly concerned. The precise view which is taken of freewill and necessity must always depend mainly on the general principles of psychology which are adopted.

The aim of the following lecture is therefore to expound one view of the matter, which is mainly that of what is called Scholastic Philosophy; and to show that it furnishes a more satisfactory explanation of the facts than any other.

This indeed would seem to be a fairly good reason for holding the view advocated; but it is not to be denied that opinions are held by many persons which render it impossible for

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them to do so. These opinions, covering as they do a much wider field than that to which the lecture was limited, have only been incidentally touched upon; that is, the conclusions as to the freedom of the Will, to which they necessarily lead, have been submitted to criticism on internal grounds, but the general principles on which those conclusions are based have been passed over with a bare mention, as belonging more directly to the subjects of other lectures in this series. A full consideration of them will be found in the Lectures on the *Existence of God*, by Mgr. Canon Moyes, *Modern Freethought*, by Fr. Gerard, S.J., and the *Immortality of the Soul*, by Dr Aveling.

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THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

We may consider the Will from two distinct points of view. One is that of the philosopher, who seeks to determine what its nature and action are in themselves; the other is that of the theologian, who desires to gain some idea of its relation to the supreme will of God.

Two aspects of the subject—philosophical and theological

It is to the former aspect of the subject—the philosophical—that interest is chiefly directed at the present day. For the moment, people are more curious about their relation to their material environment than about any connection they may have with an immaterial and supra-sensible order of things; and in regard to the human Will they are less ready to inquire whether its freedom is implied in its relations with its Creator, than whether it is to be reckoned as a force independent of the order of nature in which it acts. And in any inquiry into the question of freewill, it is certainly

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true that the philosophical question must take precedence of the theological; since it is evident that if the Will is not free by nature, no theological considerations can show it to be so: while if freedom can be shown to be inherent in the Will, it is possible indeed to suppose that this freedom may be suppressed or modified by Divine power; but we have at any rate, in that case, a basis for theological speculation which is otherwise wanting.

I propose therefore to consider the question first and chiefly from the philosophical side. Though I shall have a word to say on the theological question, I do not intend to discuss it at length, for the reasons I have given.

The former to be treated at greater length

I would first of all remind you that the Council of Trent* has defined the freedom of the Will to be of faith. Those therefore who accept the authority of the Catholic Church as final are bound to this conclusion. But no theory on the subject has ever been imposed by the Church as authoritative; and consequently, so long as we hold the Will to be free we are at liberty to maintain what view we please as to the arguments

Council of Trent

* Sess. vi. can. 5.

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by which this conclusion is to be arrived at, and as to the mode in which the freedom of the Will is exercised. In this respect we have a considerable latitude of choice; and though I hope to place before you arguments which as I venture to think, show the Determinist or necessitarian hypothesis to be quite untenable. I do not at all claim for the account I shall give of the action of the Will that it is the only one that may reasonably be held, though it is certainly the one which has the highest degree of support. You are moreover fully within your right, whether as Catholics or as thinkers, if you choose to hold that the Will is free simply on negative grounds—*i.e.*, because the opposite view is certainly untenable; without adopting any positive argument in favour of your conclusion.

More than one opinion tenable

Before proceeding to consider the subject, we must first define the terms we are to employ. What precisely are we to understand by freedom, in this connection; and what is meant by the Will?

Definition of terms

Now freedom is generally defined as the absence of external constraint. In this sense all that the freedom of the Will means is the absence of any external hindrances

Freedom

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to its following the law of its nature. Some thinkers refuse to understand it in any other sense than this. Locke, for instance, considers that the only intelligible sense which can be attached to the phrase "Freedom of the Will" is freedom to do what one wills; and Huxley in like manner says that the only sense in which he can understand it is that of freedom to do as one likes within certain limits.* But of course much more than this is usually meant by freewill. What we ordinarily mean to express by freedom as predicated of the Will is that it is not merely free from external interference with the law of its action, but that its freedom is itself that law: the Will, in other words, is not merely able to act when set in motion by its proper causes, but is itself, in some degree at least, the cause of its own actions. Determinists, on the other hand, assert that the Will, however free to act in its own way, is set in motion and directed by causes external to itself, as everything else in the world is. A motor-car is free when the road before it is unobstructed and its machinery is working. But it can only move by the action of the driver upon it. Now

* Locke, *Human Understanding*, ii. 21; Huxley, *Science and Morals*.

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the upholders of freewill maintain that the Will represents both car and driver: while Determinists hold that the car alone represents the Will, which can only act when driven by an external cause. The Will is of course the only thing to which freedom in the former sense is ever ascribed.

Then what is to be understood by the Will? Our definition of it must depend on the view which we take of the constitution of human nature. If we consider that man is constituted by matter and nothing else, then the Will, in the only sense in which freedom can be attributed to it, cannot exist: it is practically identical with appetite. Thus with Hobbes* the Will is the "last appetite" preceding the action: with Locke† it is merely the power to perform actions: with Herbert Spencer‡ it is a combination of "states of consciousness": and it is obvious that freedom, in the sense in which we have defined it for the present purpose, cannot conceivably be attributed to appetite, or power, or states of consciousness; since we can only think of them as the results of causes,

The Will

Materialist view of Will

* *Leviathan*, part i., chap. 6.
† *Hum. Und.*, ii. 16.
‡ *Principles of Psychology*.

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outside themselves, in the physical constitution or environment of the person in whom they exist. In this view the Will is not a faculty, but merely one of a succession of physical states.

There could scarcely be any more effectual way of proving that the Will is not free, than to prove that the Will does not exist. But of this we have no proof. What is offered us is merely an assumption.* I do not complain of the assumption being made; but what I venture to assert is that it has not been, and cannot be verified, and must therefore be rejected. I will not go at length into this question, which is, I need hardly say, a very large one, and goes far beyond our present scope. It is enough for my

* Professor Bain (*The Emotions and the Will*, p. 311, 2nd edition) considers that the Will is built up from a basis of spontaneity, self-conservation, and retentiveness, under "laws of association." But in the absence of any evidence that these qualities are inherent in matter, we have surely no right to attribute them to it; and a law of association would seem to imply something more than matter for its subject. We can see, for instance, material objects obeying the law of gravity. But no one has ever seen them in the act of associating ideas; and it is surely an arbitrary assumption to assert that they do so, without conclusive evidence, such as we do not possess, that nothing but matter exists. The somewhat crude suggestion of Locke (*Human Understanding*), that God may have endowed material bodies with thought, seems really to be a complete statement of the Materialist position.

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purpose to point out that if an assumption explains the facts for the explanation of which it has been made; and provided there is no rival hypothesis to dispute its authority, then it may be accepted, provisionally at least, as sufficient. But if it fails to account for the facts, and if there is another hypothesis which does account for them, the conclusion must be the reverse. Now I hope to show that the assumption that man has no soul, and therefore no Will, and by consequence no freewill, is in the latter and not the former predicament. The assumption that man has only a material nature will not, I submit, account for the phenomena of Will: whereas the theory that man has a free Will does account for them, and is the only way in which they can be accounted for. If, therefore, it can be shown that the Determinist hypothesis does not account for the facts, the Materialist theory, which necessarily issues in Determinism, must be so far discredited; and if further it can be shown that the theory of freewill does account for them, the postulate of an immaterial soul upon which that theory rests will, so far, be proved to be correct, and must hold the ground in the absence of any successful rival.

I will therefore assume for the present that

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we have souls, as well as bodies—*i.e.*, a rational and immaterial as well as a material and merely animal being; and that our souls possess the three powers, or faculties, of memory, intellect, and will. Following St Thomas Aquinas, I will define Will as the appetitive faculty of the rational nature; *i.e.*, the Will is to our immaterial and rational nature what appetite is to our material nature. Thus the object of the appetite is something concrete, something material; while the object of the Will is an idea, or something abstract and immaterial; which is present to the mind, and not merely, if at all, to the senses. A little reflection will, I think, convince us that we have the two faculties of Will and appetite, and that they are readily distinguishable from one another. They exist often in close connection with each other; as when, for instance, the appetite craves for dinner, and the Will thereupon fixes upon a menu which shall be agreeable, wholesome, and not too expensive; using for that purpose the intellect, which considers the properties of different kinds of food; and the memory, which recalls their previous effects upon the bodily organs. They not unfrequently come into mutual opposition — as when the appetite

Existence of Soul assumed

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demands something which the intellect, acting upon remembered physical experiences, or possibly upon medical advice, declares to be unwholesome, and the will consequently rejects what the appetite craves—or perhaps yields to it, with disastrous consequences.

The freedom of the Will is therefore to be defined as the power of choosing between the various objects presented to it by the intellect, in contradistinction to the Determinist theory that the Will is unable to choose any other object than that which it actually does choose.

Definition of Freewill

Now I have first of all to point out that, for practical purposes, the human race has already agreed that every sane person of years of discretion is possessed of this freedom of choice. All our moral judgements rest upon the assumption that this is the case. Praise and blame are awarded according to the power which a person is supposed to have had of acting otherwise than as he did: "qui potuit malum facere et non fecit" is the comprehensive definition of a good man, which is formulated by one of the most ancient of moralists, and which the world has hitherto found no reason for altering. If we try to

Consent of Mankind

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imagine a world in which Determinism should be universally in possession, we come face to face with a moral revolution of amazing proportions. No one in such a world would be supposed to be able to help his actions, given the conditions under which he has to act: the duty of the moralist and the legislator would be simply to provide the conditions most favourable in every case to virtue; actions which are now condemned as immoral would then, it must be supposed, be regarded as nothing more than the result of imperfect conditions; and the blame (if in any sense blame could still be attached to anything) would be due, not at all to the criminal, but entirely to the society which produced him. Thus, the contemplation of the highest virtue and of the most degraded vice would leave us alike unmoved; we should no more think of condemning the burglar who robs us, or of praising the benefactor who enriches us, than we now think of condemning the east wind or praising the sunshine. A prison and a lunatic asylum would excite in us precisely the same feelings; and the love of mother, or wife, or friend, if we were logical (as happily those who hold Determinist principles seldom are), would be

The result of Determinism a moral revolution

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esteemed among human beings precisely as it is by the occupants of a farmyard. It is difficult indeed to see how society could continue in anything like its present form, if mankind once gave up its belief in freewill. The interest of life would assuredly have vanished—the springs of feeling, which are the motive power of action, would have been dried up at their source. I do not deny that a new basis for quasi-moral judgements or for the natural affections, might conceivably be discovered in such a case. But I do not think that much promise is to be found in the Determinist systems of morality—whether the Comtist or the Spencerian—which are now before the world.*

However that may be, the virtual agreement of mankind on the subject of freewill is unquestionable, and is a piece of evidence that must be taken into account. It does not of course amount to proof: mankind has been, and may probably still be mistaken about many

* The fact that individuals who have adopted Determinist principles are for the most part not less moral or affectionate than their neighbours goes to show that it is impossible to follow those principles in practice. But it may be admitted that Determinism cannot be sporadically acted on by individuals under social conditions which assume the truth of its contrary.

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things. But its mistakes have been invariably in its inferences; it is quite impossible for it to be deceived as to matters of direct consciousness —whether that consciousness comes through the senses alone, or by any other means as well.*

Now it is beyond doubt that the consciousness of freedom of choice cannot be based, as it is popularly supposed to be, upon a direct intuition of freedom as such. For the idea of freedom is mainly a negative one (the absence of constraint), and must therefore be inferred and not perceived. It is, moreover, an idea and not a thing, and consequently is the work of the mind, not an object of the senses: it is further a complex idea, made up of the ideas of a motive, an action, and the absence of any external constraining influence: it can therefore only be obtained by a synthetic process—a putting together of ideas—which can only be the result of a train of thought, which may indeed be instinctive and even unconscious, but is none the less necessary.

Grounds of consent

But though our sense of freedom depends on

* It is no doubt certain that all knowledge is founded on sense-perception. But if the mind is also conscious of itself as the thinking subject, this consciousness must be essentially independent of the senses, though sense-perception must be its necessary condition.

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an inference which is liable to error, it is nevertheless based on some thing of which we are directly conscious, and in regard to which it is therefore difficult to believe that we are universally mistaken. This something is the sense of effort which more often than not accompanies choice; and the effort itself is by no means physical, though it is often associated with physical effort, but purely mental. It would seem that our idea of freedom depends in the last resort on this feeling of effort, of which we are aware in much the same way as that in which we are aware of our own existence and personal identity. From this consciousness we infer that we are ourselves the authors of our own choice: from the frequent necessity of this effort, we infer that there may be forces opposed to any particular choice we may make; and from the fact that we frequently resist and overcome these forces, we conclude that the decision rests finally not with them, but with our wills—and so arrive at the complex idea of freedom.

Freewill a matter of inference

Now it is contended by the upholders of freedom that this inference is a correct one; and its validity can hardly be denied by anyone who admits the reality of the intuition upon which it depends.

But the inference is valid

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Accordingly, it is here that the Determinist argument joins issue. Nature, we are told, has played a trick upon mankind something like that which conjurors call "forcing" a card. The conjuror invites one of his audience to choose a card from the pack which is held out to him: he chooses one, as he thinks, freely; but in fact he takes the one which the conjuror intends him to take, and he is really unable to choose any other. The difference, however, between the two cases is this. The conjuror can and does tell us how his trick is performed; in fact, we only believe in the trick because we are shown "how it's done"; whereas the Determinist argument fails at precisely this point. It assures us that we are the victims of a trick, but tells us nothing of the method by which Nature, the conjuror, has succeeded in taking us all in.

Determinist argument

What we are told is this. Everything has a cause, and that cause is external to itself; nothing, so far as we have any evidence, is uncaused—and to be self-caused is the same thing as to be uncaused.* We have no reason to suppose that the Will is exempt from this law of causation; on the contrary,

Causation

* *Cf.* Huxley, *Science and Morals.*

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we have evidence to show that it is subject to it, as everything else is. The advance of knowledge has by degrees simplified our notions of causation. Whereas the early Greek philosophers thought of four ultimate causes—"φύσις, ἀνάγκη, τύχη, καὶ πᾶν τὸ δι' ἀνθρώπου" (nature, necessity, chance, and all human action), we have already got rid of necessity and chance as independent causes, and human action has, in fact, been also eliminated, though the fact of its elimination has not yet been universally accepted. Thus Nature alone remains as the one supreme cause, to which all other causes are reducible. Now, how does Nature act upon the Will? It constrains it by furnishing it with motives. We cannot act without a motive, and the cause of our actions is always the strongest motive presented to the Will. The idea of Will acting as a disturbing force in the order of Nature, incalculably and irresponsibly, is a mere imagination: no such thing has ever been experienced: we all practically admit that the Will is dominated by the strongest motive when we acknowledge, as we must, that we have a reason—good or bad—for everything we do. If we inquire what a motive is, and how the strength of motives is constituted, the answer is plain. A motive is a

Motives

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possible object of desire or choice, and it is strong or weak according as it corresponds more or less with the character of the person affected; which again is the result of heredity and experience,* and is found on analysis to consist merely in a combination of states of consciousness. We delude ourselves by the imagination of an "ego" behind these states of consciousness, which "determines their cohesions"; whereas there is no such "ego" in existence, but the states of consciousness "cohere" with external motives according to an absolute law. We cannot say in all cases what the precise element of character may be that is specially related to a particular motive; but this in time will no doubt be discovered. At present the dependence of volition upon external circumstances is so far calculable, that the actions of the great majority of any number of persons in given circumstances may, by the aid of statistics, be accurately predicted. The effort of which we appear to be conscious in determining our choice is really only the influence of motives upon us: we imagine we are deliberating when we are really only submitting to the influences of contrary motives, of which the strongest prevails in the end.

* Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*.

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The Determinist theory may be illustrated thus. Suppose a stone to be thrown straight up into the air: the impulse of the throw contends with and for a time overcomes the force of gravity: presently it slackens, and the stone is balanced for an instant in equilibrium: then gravity prevails and the stone falls to earth. Suppose, further, that the stone is endowed with the power of thought, and imagine it reflecting on its actions, and thinking that it has chosen to fly upwards; then that it has, while in equilibrium debated with itself whether to ascend higher or to return to the ground, and decided on the latter alternative, and you will have a picture of the supposed freewill in action, deliberation, and decision.

Illustration

I think it cannot be denied that there is much truth in this view of the matter. First, it will be quite clear to anyone who will take the trouble to observe his own actions for a short time, together with the mental processes which precede and accompany them, that it is impossible to act without a motive of some sort. It may be a good one or a bad one, adequate or inadequate, but without a motive—*i.e.*, a reason—action, and consequently volition, is practically inconceivable. We may

Determinist theory, how far true

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act and will, indeed, out of what is called perversity; but even then, the motive is to show our independence of character, or to surprise or shock our friends: if we succeed in avoiding one motive, it is only (as Professor Bain says) to fall into the arms of another. Secondly, it is equally obvious that the strength and influence of a motive are very largely determined by the character. For "what is one man's meat is another man's poison," and what a man desires or does not desire, likes or dislikes, depends on what his character is. Thirdly, it must be admitted that the character is formed to a great extent by experience, through the acquisition of habits, and by heredity. But that there is something more involved in the constitution of motives than character, and therefore something which experience and heredity will not wholly account for, I hope to show presently. Fourthly, since there is a vast number of objects in regard to which all men are disposed alike, it is quite true that the action of a number of persons in given circumstances can be predicted with more or less accuracy, according to the extent, more or less, to which the necessary disposition prevails among mankind. Thus it is fairly certain that any number of hungry persons, who have food set

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before them, will eat it; or that any crowd assembled in the road will disperse at the approach of a motor. But as the community of disposition in regard to the motive presented decreases, so also will the possibility of prediction decrease. It may be quite possible to foretell in round numbers how many persons will travel by a particular train from the city on a given day; but it would be impossible to say whether a particular cab would be engaged or not at a given moment: in the one case there is an obvious motive common to a large number of persons, in the other there may probably be none.

But now, having made these admissions, I must indicate the reasons which make it impossible to accept the Determinist position as a whole.

Reasons for denying it

1. As a hypothesis, though there is in it no *à priori* impossibility, it fails to account for the facts, and therefore must be rejected. The facts which it fails to account for are first, the general conviction of mankind, which, as we have noticed, is in favour of freewill. No attempt at explanation is ever made: the conviction is said to be a mistaken one, and that is all. But if it is asserted that Nature has deceived us with a

Does not account for general consent

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conjuror's trick, we must see "how it is done" before we can accept the statement. If the delusion is said to rest on the notion that there is an "ego" behind the states of consciousness which we call Will, it must be shown not only that the notion is untrue, but also how mankind ever came to possess it; or rather, the demonstration of its untruth must necessarily include the explanation of the error; as, for example, the demonstration of the Copernican System not only proved the world to be round, but also, incidentally, explained why it had been supposed to be flat.

Secondly, it fails to account for the sense of effort accompanying choice, upon which, as we have seen, the general belief in freewill is founded. If choice is not active but passive, if the Will is moved, and does not move itself—how did mankind ever come to mistake the one for its precise contrary? How did people ever come to distinguish a weak Will from a strong one, as we all commonly do, if the strength or weakness is not in the Will at all, but in the motives?

And sense of effort

2. All discoveries of truth have beneficial practical consequences; they must necessarily have such consequences, since every fresh discovery definitely in-

Cannot be acted on in practice

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creases the harmony between mankind and its environment. But the discovery that the Will is not free has no such consequences: the fact, as we have said, is quite the contrary.

Though we have not freewill, says Bishop Butler, we must act as if we had it.* Now I would ask, Could any great discovery have ever been accepted as true upon such a condition? If we had been told that the world is round, but that we must act as if it were flat; if we heard that America had been discovered, but that we must act as if there were no such continent in existence; if we were told that anæsthetics were accessible and safe for sufferers, but that they must in no case make use of them—should we believe the representations of the professed discoverers in those cases?

3. We are by no means bound to believe in universal causation, but quite the contrary. It is at least obvious that if we follow in imagination the chain of cause and effect to its beginning, we must come to a cause which is not an effect—which in other words is uncaused; for otherwise we must imagine

Causation is not universal

* *Analogy*, ch. vi., "Though it were admitted that this opinion of necessity were speculatively true; yet with regard to practice, it is as if it were false."

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a circle in which ultimately the effect produces its own cause, or else we must produce the series to infinity, both of which alternatives are inconceivable. I do not say, it must be observed, that the Will is uncaused; but that there is no necessity of thought which compels us to think of everything as caused by something else; there must be one thing at least which is not so caused.

4. But the foundation of the Determinist argument is the assumption that the Will necessarily acts under the influence of the strongest motive. This sounds well; but a very little consideration will show that the assumption is entirely baseless. What reason have I for thinking that the motive on which I act is the strongest? Only the fact that I act upon it. But if the argument is that a motive is the strongest because I act on it, and I act on it because it is the strongest, we are in a vicious circle, which can prove nothing. The argument set out in full appears to be this:—"I have no freedom of choice, but am influenced entirely by motives: the motive which influences me must be stronger than those which do not: therefore I act on the strongest motive: therefore I have no freedom

What is meant by the Strongest Motive

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of choice." We could hardly have a more flagrant instance of the circular form of argument.

This theory of the strongest motive has indeed some weight, if it is admitted that man has no Will at all, but is merely "a highly differentiated portion of the earth's crust and gaseous envelope," adrift on the tide of universal causation. But this is what the facts of the case, as we have already seen, do not allow us to admit.

There is, besides, a class of facts which requires special notice in this connection. We are told quite truly, that the strength of a motive in relation to the individual is constituted by his character, which again is the result of heredity and experience. But it is very frequently the case that a person acts in direct opposition to his character, and quite as often as not he does so without the introduction into his surroundings of any new circumstance which can constitute a motive for his actions. Take the case—unhappily a very common one—of a confirmed drunkard. Let us suppose—what is only too easy to suppose—that he is such by heredity, by habit, and by environment. On a particular Saturday his attention has been called—

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perhaps at a Salvationist meeting—to the future awaiting the drunkard in hell-fire. This is no new idea to him: he is familiar with the notions of hell and damnation, and frequently refers to them in his ordinary conversation. But on this particular occasion his attention having been specially directed to these notions, he runs counter to his ordinary habits and the whole tendency of his character; passes, though with much reluctance, the public-house he usually patronises, and goes home sober. Now where in the character or environment of this man—who is by no means an imaginary personage—is the element that has for the moment constituted the fear of hell a stronger motive than the love of drink? We may, if we choose, assume that it has been latent throughout his life, and depends upon some unrecorded experience, or some unaccountable reversion of heredity. Or we may say that he has freely directed his attention to a consideration which he had previously chosen to neglect, and has acted on a motive which he has practically constructed for himself. I submit that in the entire absence of evidence we have no right to make the assumption on which the former conclusion is based, and that the latter is the only one

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possible, consistently with the facts of the case.

Sir Oliver Lodge has recently said * that "we follow the strongest motive; but there is something in ourselves that constitutes this motive, and regulates its strength." I readily accept this statement, so far as it goes, as a true account of the relation between motive and Will. Whether it implies freedom or not must depend upon the nature of our contribution to the strength of the motives on which we act; whether, that is to say, we are unable to help contributing whatever it is that constitutes the motive and regulates its strength, or are free to give or withhold it at our choice. But if we invest external objects, or our ideas of them, with the character of motives by any necessary and so to speak automatic process, such as the attraction of a particular character by a particular idea, then the Will is dominated by the motive, and both by the nature of things; Will and motive cohere like two bubbles which meet on the surface of a stream, both of them atoms in the vast current of existence rolling aimlessly through space. But we have already seen reason to refuse

We make our own motives

* *Hibbert Journal*, March 1905.

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acceptance to such a theory of volition; we must therefore conclude that we ourselves give or refuse spontaneously the essential characteristics of motives to our ideas; and thus we may be said truly, though in a somewhat figurative sense, to follow the strongest motive: provided that it is understood that it is we who give the motive its strength by our own free volition.

We have now reached a point in our inquiry at which we might very well be content to stop. We have seen that the facts which lie before our view do not admit of the application of the theory of Determinism, but necessarily imply some sort of freedom in the Will: and since in order to be free it must exist, not merely as an aspect of a material organism—as power, or a state of consciousness, but as a faculty of a spiritual nature, in some degree independent of the material organism which belongs to it—it follows that the hypothesis which denies to humanity any nature that is not material, is discredited; and the assumption with which we started, that man has an immaterial soul, is thereby justified. One may, I think, be very well content to know that the rough common sense of mankind is right in

Conclusion of negative argument

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its belief that the Will is free, the opposite belief being manifestly untenable, without troubling to inquire further as to the nature and precise limits of its freedom.

Nevertheless, there are some further facts and considerations which throw light on the nature of the Will's freedom and the method of its operation, and are at least interesting; and which we cannot leave entirely without notice.

We have already seen that Will is a faculty of the rational nature, and that its action is so far limited that it can only pursue intellectual ideas. I will now call your attention to another limitation of the Will's action; a very important, and I think a very obvious one. It can only seek what is good, or what at least appears to be so. We are so constituted that we must seek our own happiness or well-being; and all our actions, with the volitions on which they depend, are necessarily directed to this one supreme end. We may be very often mistaken as to the means by which this end is to be attained; and the means which we choose must often be adapted only to its partial attainment under the generally untoward circumstances of human life. But the object which is ultimately in our

Limitations of Will

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view is invariably the greatest amount of happiness that circumstances will permit us to secure.* Thus a martyr chooses torture and death because of the perfect happiness to which he believes they will bring him: a poor mother denies herself food and clothing because, her choice being limited by circumstances, it will give her greater happiness to see her child healthy and warm than to enjoy these benefits herself at her child's expense: a University oar goes through the labours and sacrifices of his training, because he expects to derive greater happiness from the honour of a seat in the boat and possible victory than from an uninterrupted indulgence in tobacco and made dishes. "Qui studet optatam cursu contingere metam multa tulit fecitque puer"—so Horace puts the philosophy of the Will in a nutshell.

Thus it is evident that the Will necessarily follows the motive that is for it identified with good. Its freedom consequently must lie in a power of so identifying, or refusing to identify motives with the good to which it is determined. But we must

The Will determined to good

* Compare Bramhall (*Controversy with Mr Hobbes*): "Though the Will be blind, yet its object is good in general, which is the end of all human action."

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remember that the Will and the intellect are distinct faculties, and have their distinct functions (though it is probable that both are necessary factors of the ego, or personality, so that neither can be at any moment independent of the other). Therefore, in analysing the functions of the will, we must be careful not to confuse them with those of the intellect; strictly speaking, the Will cannot deliberate, nor the intellect choose. Consequently, it is the part of the intellect to estimate the relative value of different motives, and so to speak, to report on them to the Will, which then chooses the one which is considered on the whole to be the best. But again, it is the Will that initiates all action, whether mental or physical; therefore the consideration of motives by the intellect can only take place at the bidding of the Will. We have then, apparently, this curious situation—that the intellect and the Will obey one another in turn: the Will commands the intellect to consider the motives before it; and the intellect determines the action of the Will by the report which it makes on them. But before the Will can bid the intellect investigate, the subjects of investigation must obviously have been somehow presented to it; and since these subjects are

The Intellect and the Will

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necessarily intellectual ideas, they must be present to the intellect before they can be transmitted to the Will. Thus we perceive a double function of the intellect, active and passive. It first merely reflects ideas (which it derives ultimately from the senses) without reasoning about them, and in this it may be considered passive; then it actively considers the alternative motives before it, if so ordered by the Will; and makes its report, on which the Will acts. Thus the intellect is first a mere passive reflector, by what we may perhaps call the Will's permission, and secondly an active agent by the Will's express command.

Now, if you have followed me through this somewhat intricate analysis, you will have recognised first, that the process I have tried to describe is a matter of constant experience—and it is plain that experience alone can be the judge of any account that is given of the Will's operation; and secondly, that the Will's freedom is exercised in initiating, or refusing to initiate the process of investigation in regard to any particular motive.

Illustration

Let me try and illustrate the matter by a concrete example. I go into a shop to buy a hat; I necessarily desire the

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kind of hat that will contribute most to my happiness—that is to say a cheap one, a well-fitting one, and one of graceful appearance. Four hats are offered for my inspection, A, B, C, and D: I look at them all, and receive a certain intellectual impression of them in consequence. Then I begin a careful examination of each one separately. I reject A, because it fails to fit my head; I reject B also, because it is too expensive; but I find C in every way suitable, so I buy it, and trouble myself no further about D. Now I might plainly, if I had chosen, have proceeded to examine D, and restrained my desire to possess C until I had done so: possibly in that case I might have found D to be an even more attractive hat than C. Then I should have had what has been called an *affective* Will towards C, but an *effective*, or *elective* Will towards D.* Or, again, I might, if I had been in a great hurry, have taken the first that came; I might have considered it more for my happiness to wear a hat too large for me than to waste time in choosing another. In either case I should have exercised my freedom in commanding

* Rickaby, *Moral Philosophy*, p. 45: "What attracts the sensitive appetite, commonly allures also the *effective* Will, though on advertence the *elective* Will may reject it."

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my intellect to consider the qualities of the hats before me whether partially, exhaustively, or not at all. But I was absolutely bound to take the hat I finally thought the best in all respects; in other words, I cannot help obeying the final report of my intellect as to the value of the various motives in respect of the necessary end of all my actions, happiness.

Freewill, then, acts through the intellect; it follows that its right exercise consists in the full consideration of all motives, the result in that case being the perception of what under the circumstances is truly the best: the judgement is then in accordance with the actual facts. When the Will is perverse, the intellect judges hastily or partially; and its verdict is then likely to be out of harmony with the realities of the case. Thus the pleasures of sin may be chosen freely if attention is withheld from its consequences:* virtue cannot fail to be the choice of those who consider not

The right use of motives

* Compare St Thomas's account of the sin of the fallen angels. They sinned in the only way they could, by choosing what was desirable in one aspect, but wholly bad in another; they adverted to the former aspect, but paid no attention to the other. *Summa* I. 63, i.—"Hujusmodi peccatum non præexigit ignorantiam, sed absentiam solum considerationis eorum quæ considerari debent."

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merely its present inconveniences, but also its future reward, and the penalties of rejecting it. "We needs must love the highest, *when we see it*"—so Lord Tennyson's King Arthur sums up the distinguishing features of all right action —perhaps with greater scientific accuracy than his literary creator intended.

The great merit that I would claim for this account of the Will's operation is that it explains all the facts for which explanation is required.

This theory accounts for the facts

1. The sense of effort which accompanies choice is obviously caused by the force, greater or less, which the Will applies to the intellect when it compels it to consider further motives, while already under the influence of an affective desire for one, which, of course, may be either action of some kind or a refusal to act at all. Thus by a *strong* Will is to be understood one which forces the intellect to keep in view the remoter, but possibly most important aspects of its motives, in spite of the affection which the more obvious ones excite in it. A *weak* Will is one which is readily attracted by the more obvious motives, and so neglects the consideration of the remoter ones. A *sluggish* Will is one which makes the most of "libertas contra-

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dictionis," by preferring inaction to action whenever possible.

2. The moral judgements of mankind in general find confirmation in this view of the subject. Praise and blame are awarded to persons who might have acted otherwise than as they did, because they followed, or neglected, the right motive. But if they followed it, it was because they considered it; if not, it was because they neglected to do so. Thus persons are sometimes excused for wrongdoing because they knew no better—*i.e.*, the right motive had never been presented to their minds: sometimes they are not excused, because, though they knew no better, we think they "ought to have known"—*i.e.*, the right motive was before their minds, but they neglected to consider it.

In this connection it may be observed that we have a rational account of the remarkable phenomena of conscience, remorse, and repentance. The Will chooses hastily on incomplete consideration, and a wrong action is done. Afterwards, but too late, the Will sets the intellect in action upon the motives which surrounded the misdeed: it perceives the right course to take, but the Will can choose no longer, since the moment for acting has passed. Hence the

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discomfort of the Will which is called remorse, and which is the first step to repentance. When the apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet* said, "My poverty but not my Will consents," he expressed in a poetical paradox his sense that he was doing wrong, because he confined his view to the immediate relief which his wrong action would bring him; though he knew that he was avoiding the consideration of higher motives, which if he had forced himself to consider them, would necessarily have influenced his Will in a contrary direction.

3. We have seen that we cannot act without a motive, and that this motive is always, in the last resort, our own happiness. But we are free to choose the means by which happiness is to be attained; and whether we choose rightly or wrongly depends upon the consideration which we give to the means we have before us.

4. We have also seen that one test of the truth of a theory is the nature of the practical consequences which flow from it. A true view of the nature of the Will's freedom must enable us, not indeed to force it to act rightly, which would imply that it is not free, but certainly to help it to do so. Now, if the account just given is true, how can people best be helped to do

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right? Evidently, by making true information on all possible motives as easy as possible to be obtained by the intellect—in other words, by education. And here again the common sense of mankind is in our favour; for it is precisely to education that the civilised world is looking at this moment as the great regenerator of morals; though unhappily there is a perverted notion abroad that the most important and most certain facts are best excluded from the educational curriculum.

5. We have seen that the Will, if it is free, must in a sense be self-moved. But there is certainly a difficulty in supposing it to be absolutely so. For it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive that there can be more than one thing which is self-moved. That one is of course the "primum movens," the Source of all motion; and there cannot well be two such sources, much less a number equal to the myriads of individual human Wills.

But the solution of the difficulty is now within our grasp. The Will can have no phenomenal cause outside itself, since its action is spontaneous, as some physical processes are said to be.* But it depends on the first cause, the primal Source

* Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 297 *seq.*

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of life and energy, from which, like everything else, the Will derives its nature and action. This cause is God, who moves the Will to act, not as His instrument merely, but "secundum proprietatem"—according to its proper nature, an essential part of which is spontaneity, or freedom.

We are thus brought to the consideration of the second aspect of freewill which I have mentioned, and which I propose to discuss very briefly, namely the theological. We have in this regard to inquire how the freewill of man is related to the supreme Will of God. We have just seen very broadly what the relation is: God is the cause of all things, and their prime mover. He cannot be conceived of as being anything less than this. But as Creator He has given to everything its proper nature, and though the action of every creature depends on Him, He so to speak respects the nature He has created, and causes it to act according to its own laws. I need hardly say that He is able to suspend those laws, and to cause His creatures to act independently of them. But such a departure from the order of Nature is a miracle; and since miracles are outside the scope of our present inquiry, we need

Theological aspect of Freewill

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not consider whether the freedom of the Will has ever been suspended by Divine power or not. The question is as to its normal relations with Divine power.

Two difficulties occur in respect of these relations.

Difficulties

1. God is omnipotent and omniscient, and all things must consequently be foreordained by Him from eternity. If this is so, how can the human Will be free? If all its actions are already determined, and their results known and woven into the great scheme of creation, they must, it is sometimes thought, be necessary in the same way as the growth of a vegetable or the actions of solid bodies under the law of gravitation.

1. Predestination

But the answer is a fairly simple one. The free actions of the Will are foreseen and allowed for; they and their results are present to the Divine mind beforehand, and so enter into what we may call its calculations. It is not, however, strictly correct to speak of God's foreknowledge simply, as if it in any way resembled that foreknowledge which is occasionally possible with human beings. The Divine mind acts in eternity, not merely in time; and "in æternitate omnia simul"—in eternity all things are present—there

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is neither future nor past. It is from neglect of this consideration that the apparent difficulty has arisen.

This question is often confused with one which is perfectly distinct from it, and with which we are not now concerned, namely, how can God's action as Creator be morally justified, seeing that He creates freely with the foreseen consequences of sin and suffering? I shall not attempt to answer this question now: I will merely observe that there is an answer, and that it is quite distinct from the answer to the question we have been considering.

2. It is a theological axiom that grace is necessary for any meritorious action, and that grace is necessarily efficacious when such actions are performed by its aid. It is asked, therefore, Can the Will be free, if it is unable of itself to perform meritorious actions; and when it does perform them by efficacious grace, is not its action necessitated? 2. Grace

Now this question is an exceedingly difficult one, relating as it does to matters in themselves obscure, and in regard to which we have not probably sufficient data for a complete answer. It is, however, of by no means primary importance, though it is one of great interest, and has

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been the subject of much controversy and many volumes. The controversies between Calvinists and Arminians, and Jansenists and Jesuits, at once occur to our minds; and many of us have probably been amused by the famous Letters, in which the wit of Pascal has enlivened though scarcely illuminated the subject.

I shall hold myself excused from following the intricacies of "sufficient grace which is insufficient," and the manner in which efficacious grace becomes efficacious. I will content myself with remarking that there are many opinions on the subject, and that it is scarcely possible for anyone to frame a theory which will not be identical with some one of those which are lawfully held in the Church. It is easy enough, however, to arrive at a general conclusion, which will be sufficient for most people. If the Will is essentially free, it is certain that it must normally be so, whether influenced by Divine grace or not; and we need not wonder if we are unable to define precisely the mode in which Almighty God chooses to assist the Will without prejudicing its freedom; since, if that is the case, the operation of Divine grace only shares that obscurity in which the great majority of our surroundings in this world are involved. For my own part,

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it seems to me not impossible to suppose that the intellect may be enlightened in such a way as to make the action of the Will practically certain, while leaving its freedom unimpaired. But I would pronounce no opinion on this point.

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APPENDIX I

Of the numerous questions asked at the close of the foregoing lecture, very few bore directly on the subject to which it was confined; for the most part the questions dealt with problems arising out of the subject, and of great interest and importance in themselves, but not properly falling within the limits of a lecture on the freedom of the Will.

It would be merely tedious to reproduce the individual questions and answers here; it will be sufficient to indicate their general character, with that of the solutions given.

1. Some difficulty seemed to be felt about the relation of motives to the Will, as set forth in the lecture. How is it possible, for example, to sin, if the Will is determined to good; and how does the question of good arise when action has to be taken on a matter of fact?

It will, I think, be readily perceived that according to the theory of freewill advocated here, wrongdoing of any sort is the result, practically, of ignorance. The Will is moved by the conclusion of the intellect, as to what is the best action to be taken. But the intellect is liable to error, which may arise from want of information, or from an incomplete examination of the motives presented to it; which again may be due to mere haste, or to such an adherence to one motive as will exclude the due con-

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sideration of the rest: as when a person is so strongly attracted by the advantages of something offered for sale that he altogether neglects the consideration of its cost. Such decisions of the Will may, of course, be culpable in various degrees, or possibly not culpable at all. But they depend invariably on a wrong verdict of the intellect, acting in obedience to the Will, as to what is good; the Will, in effect, says, "This is so good that I will not consider whether that may be better or not." Again, the apparent good, on which the Will acts, may be only a very subordinate kind of good in regard to the ultimate consequences of the action, but must in all cases be of the kind which is the proper end of the action; otherwise the action proceeds on a wrong motive. A jury, for instance, has to give its verdict, not from consideration of the welfare of the defendant, but according to the evidence; the good that might perhaps in some cases result from action in accordance with the latter motive is hopelessly vitiated by the fact that to act on it is, in the circumstances, dishonest. Such a defective action of the intellect is exemplified in the verdict "Not guilty, but don't do it again"—in which it is obvious that either the intellect was defective, or else the Will was perverse; in the former case the verdict would not have been morally culpable.

It was apparently supposed by some that the Will may some day be proved to be necessitated, without producing the consequences that were put forward in the lecture as certain to follow a general acceptance of Determinism by mankind; as the world was proved to be round, in spite of the contention of the opponents of the Copernican system that its inhabitants would in

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that case fall off. But, in the first place, the opinion of mankind as to the shape of the world did not affect their adhesion to it; whereas it is precisely the opinion of mankind as to freewill, and nothing else, that forms the basis of their moral judgements. In the second place, it must be remembered that psychological questions are not susceptible of mathematical proof or disproof, since they deal with the ultimate facts of human experience, and mathematical demonstration requires as its foundation some certainty prior to the facts with which it deals.

2. It was suggested, as a criticism of the view propounded in the lecture, that as Materialist philosophers do not ascribe the intellectual processes to any such entity as a soul, separate or separable from the body, we have therefore no right to quote their conclusions as evidence in favour of the soul's existence. But the point is simply that, as Materialism gives no account of the manner in which the material organism may be supposed to perform the functions which are called intellectual, we have nothing to support their view but their bare assertion, and the difficulty is really only put one step further back. If intelligence is a function of matter, we must be shown how it is seen to be so; if we are told that we need not suppose that we have a soul, because we can ascribe the functions which have been held to prove its existence to matter, we do not dispute the fact, since it is before us; but we want some good reason for such a proceeding, and none is as yet forthcoming; nor, from the nature of the case, is any such reason conceivable.

3. Much difficulty was made about Predestination. The questions on this subject, however, did not for the most

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part refer directly to the freedom of the Will, but dealt with the moral aspect of Creation. What most inquirers wanted to know was how the goodness of the Creator could be reconciled with His permission of man's free choice of evil, and consequent suffering. This subject could not be dealt with at sufficient length in the short space of time available; nor can it be fully gone into here. I can only indicate in the barest outline the direction in which such a vindication of Divine justice must proceed.

First, it must be noted that the conception of freewill in rational creatures is absolutely necessary for the reconciliation of the existence of evil with the justice and goodness of the Creator. For if the Will were determined, its choice of evil would be directly due to the Divine Will, instead of being at most indirectly due to it.

Secondly, it would be subversive of our necessary conception of a Divine Creator to suppose that the freewill of man can be a disturbing force in the order and harmony in which the goodness of the universe consists, and by means of which it is a worthy object of the Divine contemplation. But this order and harmony, it would seem, can only be preserved from disturbance by the exercise of the freewill of creatures, by means of the attachment of suffering as a kind of makeweight to wrong action as its necessary consequence—as shadow is a necessary consequence of the interception of light by opaque bodies. The further question implied here, viz., why God should have made free creatures at all, in view of their certain errors of choice and consequent suffering, would lead us to a consideration of the necessary independence of the Divine Will, and the impossibility of

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its being suspended on the choice of a creature: for it is evident that it would be so suspended if the Creator had been diverted from His good purpose of creation by the foreseen misuse of freewill by His creatures.

But to pursue this subject would lead us altogether beyond our necessary limits.

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APPENDIX II

A GENERAL view of the subject may be gathered from the following works :—

Aquinas, St Thomas—*Summa Theologica* (especially I. QQ. 82, 83).

Aquinas, St Thomas—*Summa Contra Gentiles* (especially II. 66, and III. 1, 2).

Augustine, St—*De Dono Perseverantiæ.*

Augustine, St—*De Correptione et Gratia.*

Augustine, St—*De Prædestinatione Sanctorum.*

Bain, Professor—*The Emotions and the Will.*

Bain, Professor—*Mental and Moral Science.*

Bramhall, Bishop—*Controversy with Mr Hobbes.*

Butler, Bishop—*Analogy of Religion.*

Calvin—*Institutes.*

Cudworth—*On Liberty and Necessity.*

Hobbes—*Leviathan* (Book I.).

Hume—*Essays.*

Huxley—*Essays* (especially Essay on Science and Morals).

Jansenius—*Augustinus.*

Kant—*Critique of Practical Reason.*

Locke—*Essay on the Human Understanding.*

Molina—*Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiæ Donis . . . Concordia.*

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Mozley, J. B.—*The Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination.*
Pascal—*Provincial Letters.*
Sanseverino—*Philosophia Christiana.*
Spencer, Herbert—*Principles of Psychology.*
Ward, W. G.—*Essays on the Philosophy of Theism.*

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